

[Oregon Mines and Mining Life]

W13900

Beliefs and Customs - Folkstuff

Accession no.

W 13900

Date received 10/10/40

Consignment no. 1

Shipped from Wash. Office

Label

Amount 10 p

WPA L. C. PROJECT Writers' UNIT

Form [md] 3 Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Oregon mines and mining life

Place of origin Portland, Oreg. Date 1/6/39

Project worker Manly M. Banister

Project editor

Remarks

Library of Congress

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Manly M. Banister Date January 6, 1939.

Address 2071 SW Park Avenue, Portland.

Subject Oregon Mines and Mining Life.

Name and address of informant Mrs. Kitty Gray

1814 SE Madison Street

Date and time of interview January 5, 1939.

Place of interview 1814 SE Madison Streets Portland.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant Her nephew,

John W. Shea, of the Oregon Historical Records Survey staff.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you None

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

The house is a large, two story one, containing four flats, each of which has a door opening into a common front hall below. Mrs. Gray was visiting her sister, Mrs. Shea, at

Library of Congress

the apartment designated D. This flat is on the lower floor, west. It is well-furnished and comfortable, but not opulent.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Manly M. Banister Date January 6, 1939.

Address 2071 SW Park Avenue, Portland

Subject Oregon Mines and Mining Life.

Name and address of informant Mrs. Kitty Gray.

1814 SE Madison Street, Portland.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates

Library of Congress

6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates

7. Special skills and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant

10. Other points gained in interview

Mrs. Gray was born in Knoxville, Iowa, October 8, 1857. She lived in Corydon, Iowa, until 1862, when the family came to Oregon. She has four daughters, three grandsons, four granddaughters, three great-granddaughters, and one great-grandson. She lives now in Salem.

Mrs. Gray is a very small woman, but she appears bright and intelligent. As she talked, she rested both hands in her lap, and these shook continually with palsy. She remarked that a year ago she could have said more than now, for her memory is not so good.

Given in her own words, this is Mrs. Gray's personal history:

"I first came to Oregon in 1862, by ox team. We landed in Oregon with a horse, a cow, and half a wagon. The wagon had broken down on the way and we cut it down to two wheels to finish the trip. My father helped build the whole town of La Grande. He was a cabinet maker, and he made the first furniture used in Grand 2 Ronde Valley. He organized the Odd Fellows Lodge in La Grande, and other places around there. I will say too that I helped build all the different churches, because I went around singing, playing, and collecting money for them. My father was the first treasurer appointed by Governor Gibbs in Eastern Oregon. It was all Union County then. There was no Baker County like there is today.

Library of Congress

"My brother was the first white child born in the Grand Ronde Valley. His name was Harry Kinsey. That was in the Valley just out of La Grande. The place was called Iowa Settlement, about ten miles from La Grande, because the people who settled there were all from Iowa.

"I belong to the Presbyterian Church now, but all my life until late years I was a Methodist. Our home was the home of all the Methodist ministers who came to eastern Oregon. They all made their homes with us. There was Father Flynn, Reverend Hines, and a number of others.

"My father had a furniture store and kept everything necessary for building purposes. He contracted to build the first building in La Grande.

"When we first came to Oregon we landed under Mt. Emily, in the Grand Ronde Valley, and there we stayed. The mountain was named after Emily Munsey, who was in our train. We took up land there like all the settlers did. But there was a reason for our coming. My father was in the Army and he contracted a severe cold. They thought he wasn't going to live, so they discharged him, and he came West for his health, intending to go to California. By the time the train got to the Grand Ronde country, everybody had lost so much stock that they took up claims there in the Valley. They were afraid to go on for fear of losing everything they had, and they decided they might as well stop here as long as they had something left.

"My father went in to La Grande and built a store for Wilkinson. Also he built a flouring mill for a man named Mastilla. That was the beginning of the town of La Grande. My father did fine work with the lathe. He made cane bottom chairs for the people, and they were glad to buy them because they needed them.

Library of Congress

"We lived on the farm four years and then went in to town because my father was not able to do farming. I can remember yet how it looked there. There was only one street with buildings on both sides.

"We had a large family — I had three sisters and four brothers. My sisters are all living, but two of my brothers are dead.

"I can remember when Lincoln was assassinated. My, there was such a lot of excitement. Nobody slept at all the night after we heard about it... There were big fires kept blazing along the street and in the square and the people milled around, talking about what had happened. It was a long time after it actually happened, of course, before we heard about it, but that didn't make the news any the less exciting."

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Manly M. Banister Date January 6, 1938

Address 2071 SW Park Avenue, Portland

Subject Oregon Mines and Mining Life

Name and address of informant Mrs. Kitty Gray

1814 SE Madison Street, Portland

Library of Congress

Text: You ought to see my daughter about Cornucopia—she can remember a lot more about it than I do. She lived there for a number of years—but she lives in Salem now, so I suppose you wouldn't be able to see her. I don't know exactly what you want, but I will tell what I can remember and you can make what you want to out of it. You know, a lot of those towns in eastern Oregon have come to life again, and among them Cornucopia. Robert Betts is general manager there.

Well, I got to Cornucopia twenty-two years ago—that was in 1916. There were probably two or three saloons at that time, a couple of hotels, a post office, and a number of other buildings. There was a blacksmith shop, too, and the mines were operating at full tilt. There more possibly a hundred and fifty or two hundred men, all told. It is a wonder they didn't have their ore stolen, they took scarcely any care of it, but they never had any trouble. It would be a great deal different nowadays.

I know more about the Columbia Mine, west of Baker, than I do about Cornucopia. It was owned by the Cable boys. It could have been my father's, but he chose the Esmeralda. The Cables finally sold out to the Georgia Company. Walter Meecham's father was the superintendent, and they tried to make away with some of the gold, but they weren't successful at it.

2

I took care of the boarding house for them, and my father did the timbering in the mine. There were about a hundred men at work there in the woods and the mines. I said they sold the mine to the Georgia Company, but instead I meant they leased it to them. I remember it well. The lease was to expire one Monday at noon and the company wanted to take up their lease again, and they wanted to get it cheaper than they had before. Of course, if the mine were really rich, the Cable boys wanted it for themselves. But the company knew this, and they wanted it too, so instead of following the main lead, they ran off at an angle into ordinary rock. They thought the Cable boys would know this and figure the mine was running out, so they would be willing to continue the lease at any figure.

Library of Congress

Well, I knew there was some sort of skullduggery afoot. The Cable boys investigated, of course, before renewing the lease, and when they found out what the company had done, they refused to renew. Frank Bailey was the superintendent there. Mr. Packwood was a bookkeeper seven years, and his son was a store keeper. They took millions out of that mine. My husband was cyanide man in the mill.

The Esmeralda Mine was three and a half miles up in the mountains from Cornucopia, and seven and a-half miles from Sumpter. That is the one my father bought. We built fifteen miles of roads and fixed the place all up for operation, with a five stamp mill and everything. We operated one season, then a snowslide took out everything, mill, houses, stores, stables and everything. It broke us up for about \$50,000 and that was the end of the Esmeralda Mine.

In the Columbia district, on Cable Cove, the Cable brothers had mines on a paying basis. They were about three and a-half miles west of us. Then there is the Ibex Mine that was working about the same time. The Red Boy, owned by Godfrey, employed a great number of men. They sent out more bullion from that part of the country than from all the other mines put together, I guess.

3

Then there was the Baizy Elkhorn—Mr. Shea, my sister's husband, used to be stationary engineer there, and my husband worked as cyanide man for about five years before they closed down. I managed the boarding house, and when it came time to bring in the payroll, I was always called on; because they figured no one would suspect a woman of bringing in the money. I used to carry it in a potato sack, or in an old suitcase, or among a box of groceries and supplies—anyway so that people wouldn't suspect I had it. I was never molested, either, and I always got the money through. The Red Boy was west of Baker and Sumpter, and so was the Ibex. The Baizy Elkhorn was between these mines and Baker, on the upper side of the Elkhorn Mountains. Nearby there is a mine that is being worked now.

Library of Congress

The accidents were quite exciting—men were always getting blown to bits. I remember I had the boarding house at the North Pole Mine, and there was a young man who used to pass the boarding house every morning on his way to work. We were quite friendly, and he was an awfully nice young man; he would wave at me every morning, and sometimes he would stop to talk for a few minutes if he had the time. Then one morning he went in to drill—they had planted a charge that didn't go off and he didn't know it. He drilled right into it and was almost blown to bits. They called me down there in a hurry to take care of him. My, he was a sight. Both of his eyes were blown out. I picked rocks out of his face and chest and took care of him, and bandaged him all up. But there wasn't much could be done for him. He died four days afterward. Then there was another man who was picking in the mines. Somehow his pick struck, slipped, and bounced back and the steel stuck right in the top of his head. They got it out and bandaged his head and it looked like he was going to be all right. He played his violin that night at a dance, and the next day he suddenly died. I remember two young men were fighting down the 4 street a ways from the boarding house. I saw them and ran out, intending to stop them if I could, but before I could get there, one of them pulled out a knife and struck at the other. The blade caught him right in the mouth and opened his mouth up clear back as far as it could go. I took him in the house and bandaged him up, and later he went into town to the hospital. The doctors said there he had been well taken care of and didn't even take off the bandage I had put on. He got all right, though, and he was back at work later.

The most exciting time we had was at the Columbia. Mr. Bailey always had trouble with his cooks, so he sent me to take charge of the boarding house. I never did any cooking—I just managed. I went down there, and there was a commotion going on all right. For some reason or other, the miners weren't going to let the two hoist men work. Mr. Bailey said, "We are going to have trouble." He had sent into town for the officers to come out, and he wanted dinner prepared for the officers when they got there. The cook was growling and grumbling and acting nasty, and he wasn't going to let me stay there. He swore he

Library of Congress

wouldn't get any dinner for the officers because he was in sympathy with the trouble at the mine. But they couldn't bluff me. I picked up a big meat cleaver and stood by the door.

"Now get to work," I said. "The first man that tries to leave this kitchen will get this cleaver right between the eyes."

They went to work and got dinner. The officers came and arrested the men who were causing the trouble. They had taken the clothes off the two hoist men and sent them off naked. But I ruled the men pretty well. We had more trouble with the cooks than with anyone else. They were always getting drunk.

I celebrated my silver wedding at the Columbia Mine. A lady from London was there with her friend, a sea captain, and we showed them all through the mine. We had a great time.

5

When our folks first located the mines a funny thing happened. There were a lot of Indians around there, but they liked my father. He had befriended one of them once by saving his baby from sickness, so they all looked up to him. One day he put on a pot of beans to cook, then went away to work. While he was gone, an old Indian came in and ate the beans. Of course, they had hardly started to cook, but he ate them anyway. A few days later they found him dead in the brush. The uncooked beans he had eaten all swelled up in his stomach and sort of put a stop to his career. I guess he was a surprised Indian all right.

The Virtue Mine was one of the richest mines in the country. Mr. Virtue was afterwards in the banking business in Baker City. I don't know much about the place, but I remember I went down once into the shaft and picked up pieces of gold from the floor.

The Flagstaff Mine and the Bonanza Mine were owned by the Geyser brothers. They shipped ore out of there for years. It was extremely rich, and it first began as a placer mine—like the old Nelson Mine.

Library of Congress

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Manly M. Banister Date Jan. 6, 1939

Address 2071 SW Park Avenue, Portland

Subject Oregon Mines and Mining Life

Name and address of informant Mrs. Kitty Gray

1814 SE Madison, Portland

Comment: Mrs. Gray spoke very low, and quite slowly, so that I was enabled to take copious notes on what she said. However, her talk was expressionable and interesting, and I have an idea more might be learned from her if we could interview her at various times, but that is almost impossible, since she is returning in a few days to Salem, where she makes her home.

When she had concluded her story, she said:

“That's about all I can think of right now. I know it isn't much, but maybe if you should come around some time in the middle of the night when I can't sleep, I could tell you lots more.”